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Biden leans toward approval of SALT

By RICHARD SANDZA

Because he feels "confident that we have the capability of verifying Soviet compliance with the strategic arms limitation agreement, Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. says he is inclined to vote for the treaty when it comes before the Senate.

"SALT, in my opinion, will rise or fall on verification," the Delaware Democrat told a morning news conference in Wilmington yesterday.

Biden, the only Senator who serves on both the Select Committee on Intelligence and the Foreign Relations Committee, said he expects to be heavily involved in the anticipated floor fight over the treaty.

"I'm inclined to vote for SALT if SALT comes as it appears it will, in the form that has been suggested, and verification is as I believe it to be," Biden said.

And, he said, "there is a serious possibility that I will be deeply involved in the floor debate and probably in favor of SALT."

In campaigning for support for the treaty, President Carter yesterday told the American Newspaper Publishers Association that he is satisfied with the nation's capability to tell whether the Soviet Union is complying with the treaty.

The treaty is near completion and an announcement of final agreement is expected soon.

Carter hopes that he can convince members of the Senate — many of whom have publicly expressed skepticism about the verification capability — to ratify the treaty when he submits it to them for a vote later in the year.

Biden emphasized that he has reached no final position on SALT. He said that he is awaiting a Senate Intelligence Committee report on a two-year study of the nation's ability to monitor Soviet arms activity. And, he said, after being briefed on that, he wants to go to Turkey to look at U.S. intelligence sites there. Then, he plans to talk about verification with the National Security Agency.

Delaware's senior senator, Republican William V. Roth Jr., is uncommitted on SALT. He was a founder of a group which calls itself the "SALT shakers." The shakers are holding meetings to hear arguments for and against SALT and verification.

Regardless of the present verification capability, Biden said that the U.S. should put new spy satellites and listening posts into operation.

With that in mind, Biden surprised fellow senators during a visit to China last week when he asked Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping if China would allow the U.S. to put up a listening post there.

Deng responded that China would consider allowing such a site if the U.S. would allow the Chinese to operate it and share the intelligence with the U.S.